

T H E

Backslider Characterized;

1607/1677.

O R,

The Evil and Danger of Defection,
described :

I N A

SERMON on John vi. 66.

Preached at *Dysart*, on a Thanksgiving-Day
after the Sacrament in that Place, Monday
October 7th, 1714.

B Y

EBENEZER ERSKINE, Minister of the
Gospel at Portmear.

Heb. x. 38. *If any Man draw back, my Soul shall have
no Pleasure in him.*



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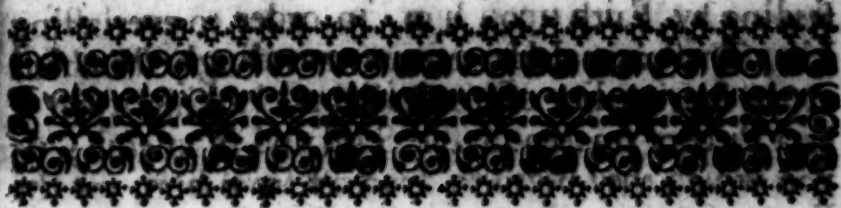
T O T H E
R E A D E R.

Reader,

THE following Discourse, being the Third that comes Abroad, was represented to the Commission, *May* 1725, by Mr. *A. A.* * as if it had been of such a turbulent or erroneous Tendency, that he himself, preaching after me, was obliged publickly to contradict me. The following Notes are, to the best of my Remembrance, the *ipsissima verba*, which I delivered at that Time. Whether the Doctrines, contained therein, deserved the Character he gave them, before the Reverend Commission; or if he had Ground publickly to contradict, I submit to the Judgment of the impartial World. Farewell.

* Mr. *Alexander Anderson*, Minister at *St. Andrews*.





A SERMON

Preached at *Dysart*, Monday October 6, 1714,

Upon *John vi. 66.*

From that Time, many of his Disciples went back, and walked no more with him.

IN the Beginning of this Chapter, our Blessed Lord works a notable Miracle ; he feeds Five thousand People with Five Loaves, and Two Fishes, Twelve Baskets of Fragments remaining : The Multitude is so taken with this miraculous Intertainment, that they would needs make him a King ; but our lowly King of *Zion* did not affect worldly Grandeur, his Kingdom not being of this World ; therefore he withdraws himself, and passes over the Sea to *Capernaum* ; many of the Multitude, whom he had fed, followed him thither ; and there our Blessed Lord takes Occasion to preach a very heavenly and spiritual Sermon un-

to them, holding out the Necessity of living and feeding by Faith upon him, in order to everlasting Life. These carnal Hearers are exceedingly stumbled at the Spirituality of his Doctrine, looking upon it as a Piece of unaccountable Stuff and Nonsense; upon which they begin to drop off from him, as the Evangelist remarks here, in the Words of my Text, *From that Time, many of his Disciples went back, &c.*

In which Words, we may notice, 1st, A Defection, or going back from Christ. 2^{dly}, The Season of it, *viz.* *From that Time*, or after he had preached the foregoing Sermon. 3^{dly}, The Cause of it, implied in the Time, *viz.* The Spirituality of his Doctrine. 4^{thly}, The Persons guilty of this Defection, *viz.* *Professed Disciples*, and that not a few, but *many* of them. 5^{thly}, The final and irrecoverable Nature of their Defection; *they walked no more with him.*

“ The Words are plain and easy; and therefore, there is no Need of any critical Explication; wherefore, take this native Observation from them, *viz.*

Doct. That there are some Seasons, wherein many of Christ's pretended Disciples do fall off from him, and that finally and irrecoverably; *From that Time, many, &c.*

In handling of this Doctrine, I shall observe the Order of the Words, and speak a little, (1.) Un- to this Defection, or Falling-off from Christ. (2.) Enquire a little into the Causes of it. (3.) The Seasons of it. (4.) The Persons guilty of the Defection, *viz.* The Disciples. (5.) Give a few Characters of those who fall off finally, and walked no more with him. (6.) Apply the whole.

First,



First, I say, I will speak a little unto this Defection, or Falling-off from Christ : And here I would, (1.) Give you some of the Scriptural Names of it, (2.) Condescend on the Kinds and Degrees of it, (3.) Its Ingredients, (4.) Its Concomitants.

First, Some Scriptural Names, by which it is called : And sometimes it is called, *a Looking back*. Luke ix. 62. *No Man, putting his Hand to the Plough, and looking back, is fit for the Kingdom of Heaven.* My Friends, ye have been professing to set your Faces Heavenward : O ! be ye aware of casting a Back-look upon your old Lovers ; Remember Lot's Wife ; Take Heed, that God do not set you up, as Monuments of his Vengeance. Again, 'Tis sometimes called *a Turning back*, Lam. i. 8. *Jerusalem sigheth, and turneth back.* The Way to Heaven will not admit of a Retreat, ye must still be pressing forward, whatever Opposition may be in your Way. Again, Sometimes 'tis called *a Drawing back*, Heb. x. 38. *If any Man draw back, my Soul shall have no Pleasure in him.* Moreover, 'tis called *a Sliding back*, intimating, that the People, that are not well buckled in Religion, stand upon slippery Ground, Hos. xi. 7. *My People are bent to Backsliding.* Furthermore, 'Tis called *a Falling back*, Isa. xxviii. 13. *The Word of the Lord was unto them Precept upon Precept, and Line upon Line, that they might go, and fall backward, and be broken, and snared, and taken ; and ye know a backward Fall is exceeding dangerous.* Lastly, To mention no more, 'tis called *a Turning aside* ; 'tis said of Israel, *That they quickly turned aside, like a deceitful Bow, which frustrates the Design of the Archer, by shooting awry, or besides the Mark.* They

They, who turn aside unto crooked Ways, whatever may be their Pretences to Religion, miss the Mark of the same, even the *Mark and Prize of the high Calling of God in Christ Jesus*; and shall be led forth, and have their Part with the *Workers of Iniquity*.

Secondly, I come to condescend on the Kinds and Degrees of Defections from Christ: And, not to multiply Distinctions, which are more ready to confound than edify Hearers; I shall only mention these Two or Three, *1st*, Defection from Christ is sometimes more universal, and general of the Body of a Church and Nation together; thus *Ephesus*, *Rev. ii.* is charged with falling from her first Love; and the whole Body of the *Israelitish* Nation are engaged together in a Defection, by going in to worship the Idolatrous Calves, which *Jeroboam* erected at *Dan* and *Beithel*; and it was so universal, that the Prophet *Elijah* thought he had been left alone; though indeed the Lord tells him, That he had Seven Thousand in *Israel*, which had not bowed the Knee to *Baal*. And sometimes more special and particular, as when a single Society, Family, or particuilar Person, enters upon a Course of Defection, and Backsliding from Christ and his Ways; of which Instances may be afterwards named. *2^{dly}*, Sometimes it is more open and avowed, in Contradistinction from the former, by abandoning and relinquishing the very Profession of Religion, which they once pretended to, and become openly wicked and flagitious, giving themselves loose Reins sin a Way of Sin, Or it is more Hid and Secret, when, tho' there be still a Profession of Religion kept up; yet the Power of Godliness is quite forsaken, and the Heart maintains a close Correspondence with Sin,

Sin, and lives in a secret Trade of Wickedness, inconsistent with the Rules of Christianity. (3.) There is a total, as also a partial Defection, or falling off from Christ: A Total or Final, is, that of the Wicked and Reprobate, who, when they fall, are like Lead, or a Stone, falling into a deep Water, which never rise again; as it is said of *Pharaoh* and his Host, *They sank, like Lead, in the mighty Waters*: They make an utter Ship-wreck of Faith, and a good Conscience. A partial Defection is in-
 oident, even to the Godly themselves; I may call it *Temporary*, for they may be left, for a considerable Time, to make many woful Steps of Defection from Christ and his Ways; as is plain from the Instances of *David*, *Peter*, *Abraham*, and many others; but when they fall, they are like Wood or Cork falling into Water, who, tho' they sink at first, yet they rise again by Faith and Repentance, which influence the Reformation of their Lives, and which in pursuit of the Divine Purpose of Grace for their Salvation, are actuated in them by the holy Spirit, according to that, *Psal. xxxvii. 24. Although he fall, he shall not be utterly cast down, for the Lord upholdeth him with his Hand.* The Defection, here spoken of in the Text, seems to have been of the first Kinds of each Division; it was general and publick, for there was a great Multitude of them, as we read in the Beginning of the Chapter; it was open and avowed, for they put a Slight on Christ, in the Face of the Sun: And it was total and final, they walked no more with him, nor lookt after Christ any more.

Thirdly, I come to notice some Ingredients of this Defection here spoken of, and there appears to have been these Things in it. (1.) A Dissatisfac-

on with Christ, and a Vilipending both him and his Way; for they said, *Verse 42. Is not his Father and his Mother and Sisters with us? how then came he down from Heaven?* (2.) A Murmuring and Repining against the Spirituality of his Doctrine, out of a rooted Enmity and Prejudice against it, *Ver. 41. They murmured at him, because he said, I am the Bread of Life which came down from Heaven;* and again, *This is a hard Saying, who can bear it?* (3.) A formal Disputing and Arguing against his Doctrine, as repugnant unto Reason; they set up their Reason as the Standard of Revelation, and will receive nothing, but what they were able to comprehend; for they strove or disputed among themselves, saying, *How can this Man give us Flesh to eat. Ver. 52.* (4.) A formal Casting off with Christ, and turning back to their old Way and Trade of living, whereby their latter End was worse than their Beginning, for they went back, and followed him no more, as in the Text.

Fourthly, I come to mention some Concomitants of Defection from Christ. (1.) It is commonly accompanied, with a Halting and Wavering between Sin and Duty, as *Israel* did between God and *Baal*, *How long*, says *Elijah* to them, *do ye halt between two Opinions? If the Lord be God, then follow him; but if Baal, then follow him.* When this wavering befalls People, they cannot stand long, for a double minded Man is unstable in all his Ways, says *James: Their Heart is divided; therefore shall they be found faulty.* (2.) It is commonly attended with a mercenary Kind of Spirit; for as secular and worldly Interest, is the Spring of all their Religion; so it is the Spring of their Apostacy and Defection from it, as is plain from what our Lord tells

(2)
tells his pretended Disciples, *Ye seek me not because of the Miracle, but because ye did eat of the Loaves and were filled*; where this mercenary Spirit prevails, Folk will stand by Christ and Religion, as long as it will stand with their selfish and secular Designs, but no longer: Christ, Conscience, Religion, and every Thing, must truckle unto this at Length. (3.) It is attended with a stretching of Christian Liberty to the uttermost Pitch, and a dallying with the Appearances of Evil; O, will the Man say, What needs all this needless Nicety and Preciseness? I may adventure thus far, and yet keep in both with God and a good Conscience; like *Eve*, who thought she might tamper with the Temptation, without any Hazard of a Compliance; Or *Samson*, who thought he might dally with *Delilah*, and yet keep in with God. O Sirs, it is dangerous going too near God's Marches: For, as one says, He that will go all the Length he may, when Occasion serves, will go further than he ought. (4.) It is attended with a snarling at Reproofs; they cannot abide to have their Sores ript up, and the Evil of their Ways discovered: Let Ministers preach never such sound Doctrine, yet if they but point towards the Airth where their Defections ly, presently they are like wild Bulls in a Net, full of Fury and Resentment; we find too much of this, even in good Men, when engaged in a partial Defection. *Asa* was so irritate by the Reproof of the Prophet, that he casts him into Prison, for telling him, That he was fallen from his former Confidence in God, when the Hosts of the *Ethiopians* came up against him. And the *Galatians* reckoned *Paul* their Enemy, because he told them the Truth. (5.) With a catching at the Reputation of those

those that stand their Ground, or who give any Testimony against their Defections; and if they can perceive any such, making but the least wrong Trip, they are sure to make it as open and publick to the World as possible, and to represent it in the blackest Character imaginable. It is a very true Observe, That Backsliders, are commonly Backbiters; they cannot abide to see any outshine themselves in Holiness and Tenderness, and therefore they ly at the Catch, to wound the Reputation of those, that cannot run the same Length with themselves; this made *David* pray, *Deliver me, O Lord, from all my Transgressions, and make me not the Reproach of the Foolish; for when my Foot slippeth, mine Enemies do magnifie themselves against me.* (6.) Division is usually the Concomitant and Fruit of Defection: If we should trace all Divisions to their Spring, whereby the Bowels of the Church of God have been rent, since the first Ages of Christianity, we should still find them taking their Rise from the bitter Fountain of Defection: What was it, but the Defections of some in the Church of *Corinth*, that gave Birth unto that Division, whereof the Apostle complains, first Epistle and first Chapter? What was it but the Defections of the Church of *Rome*, that has made such a wide Breach between Protestants and Papists? 'Tis true, every Party and Set of Men have preached up Peace, and cried out against Division, as the Papists, to this very Day, exclaim against us for making a Rupture in the Church of Christ; whereas it is not we, but they themselves, that make the Rupture by their Defections. We must not say, a Confederacy with any in a Way of Sin, or purchase Peace at the Expence of Truth and Holiness. This was the Sentiment of
good

good old *Jacob* on his Death-bed, *Gen. 49.* *Simeon and Levi are Brethren in Iniquity, Instruments of Cruelty are in their Habitation: O my Soul, come not thou into their Secret, &c.* Many other Things might be added as Concomitants of Defection; but I must not stand on them. I go on therefore unto

The *Second* Thing in the Text and Method, which was, to enquire a little into the Causes of Defection. And 1st. The main Cause, or rather Occasion of this Defection here mentioned, was the Unpleasantness of Christ's Doctrine unto the sensual and carnal Inclinations of these pretended Disciples mentioned in our Text: His Doctrine did not suit their Humors, and answer their Expectations, therefore they went back, and walked no more with him; just like many among our selves, who, if Ministers do not preach according to their Fancies, if they be free and faithful, and preach against the Defection whereof they are guilty, they either turn their Backs on them, or cry out upon them, as Men of turbulent Spirits, Incendiaries, Firebrands, and what not: But Ministers need not be discouraged on this Account, since the Apostles of our Lord were characterised after the same Manner, *These are they, that have turned the World upside-down.* I fear there are many among us, who, if they would speak the Language of their Hearts, would join Issue with that People, *Isa. xxx. 10.* *Who said unto their Seers, see not; and to the Prophets, Prophecie not unto us right Things, speak unto us smooth Things, prophecie Deceit.* But, Sirs, we need not wonder, to see Folk stumbling at the plain Truths of the Word, seeing Christ himself is set for the Fall, as well as for the Rising of many in *Israel.* 2^{dly}. The Love of worldly Riches is another

great Cause of Defection, as is plain, from that of the Apostle, *1 Tim. vi. 10. The Love of Money is the Root of all Evil, which, while some have coveted after, they have erred from the Faith, and pierced themselves through with many Sorrows.* Where the Love of the World has the Ascendant in the Heart, the Love of God cannot be strong; for if any Man love the World, the Love of the Father is not in him; and where the Love of God is not, it is impossible for that Man to stand his Ground. 3dly, The Love of worldly Ease is another great Cause of Defection from Christ, especially in a Time of Persecution for the Gospel's Sake; for then it will be said, as Peter unto Christ, when dissuading him from going up to Jerusalem, *Master, spare thy self, it is best to sleep in a whole Skin; but let us remember what Christ says in this Case, Matth. xvi. 25. Whosoever will save his Life, shall lose it, and whosoever shall lose his Life, for my Sake, shall find it.* 4thly, The Fear of Man is another Cause of Defection; Fear of Man, says Solomon, *causes a Snare*, especially the Fear of offending and displeasing great Men, upon whom we have any Kind of Dependence: But, as an Antedote against this, let us compare the Wrath of Man with the Wrath of the eternal God: Shall we adventure to run upon the thick Bosses of the Almighty's Buckler, to evite the Displeasure of a Worm like our selves? *Isa. li. 12. Who art thou, that thou shouldest be afraid of Man that shall die, and of the Son of Man that shall be as Grass, and forgettest the Lord thy Maker, that stretched out the Heavens, and laid the Foundations of the Earth?* To the same Purpose is that Caveat, given us by our blessed Lord, *Fear not Man that can kill the Body, but cannot kill the Soul, &c.* 5thly, Bad Example has a

fatal Influence this Way, and especially the bad Example of Men of Influence and Authority, such as Ministers and Magistrates; ye have a Word for this, *Hos. v. 1. Hear ye this, O Priests, and give ye Ear, O House of the King, for Judgment is toward you, because ye have been a Snare on Milpeh, and a Net spread upon Tabor.* When we have conceived a great Veneration for any Man, we are very ready to run after his Example: Thus, *Gal. ii. 13. Barnabas, with many of the converted Jews at Antioch, were led away with Peter's Dissimulation, who seemed unto them a Pillar; for which Paul withstood him to the very Face.* Let us always remember, that we are to be Followers of no Man, but in so far as they are Followers of Christ. 6thly, The Treachery and Deceit of the Heart, with its natural Bent and Byass towards Sin: The Heart is deceitful above all Things, and desperately wicked: That Character given Israel is exceedingly applicable unto it, *Hos. xi. 7. They are bent to Backsliding:* There is not only an easiness and ductility in the Heart of Man to Sin, but a strong Propensity and Inclination; so that it was not without sufficient Ground, that Solomon tells us, *Pro. xxviii. 26, He that trusts his own Heart, is a Fool;* let us therefore advert unto that Caveat of the Apostles, *Heb. iii. 12. Take heed Brethren, lest there be in any of you, an evil Heart of Unbelief, in departing from the living God.* I might mention many other Causes, if Time would allow, such as absolute and downright Hypocrisie in their Management with God; if the Heart be not right with God, People can never be stedfast in his Covenant. Again, Self-confidence, when Men lean to their own Understanding, trust to their own Strength; like Peter, *Though all Men should forsake thee, yet will not I.* There

These Resolutions, that are founded upon our own Strength, will prove like *Jonah's* Gourd, wither and come to nought, as soon as ever the Wind of Temptation flows on them. We are not to trust any created Grace that is in us, but only the Grace that is in Christ Jesus; *Be strong in the Lord, and in the Power of his Might.* Again, when Folk voluntarily disband their Guard, and slack their Watch, they yield themselves an easy Prey to the Devil; and therefore, *Be sober, be vigilant; for your Adversary, the Devil, goes about as a roaring Lion, seeking whom he may Devour.* Again, when Folk do not lay a sure Foundation. He that builds must count the Cost; they that have not a Root of solid Grace in themselves, they will fall away in the Time of Temptation. And so much for the Causes of Defection, the second Thing proposed.

The *Third* was, To enquire a little into the Seasons of Defection; the Words also give Ground for this Enquiry, *From that Time, many of his Disciples went back*; ye may take these few, among many others, (1.) Defections may happen, after God has been making very signal and remarkable Appearances in his Providence for a People: Christ, in the Beginning of this Chapter, had made a signal, yea, a miraculous Appearance for those People, by feeding them in a Desert-place; and yet, a Day or Two after, they went back, and walked no more with him. This was the Sin of *Israel*; God delivers them out of their *Egyptian* Bondage, in a wonderful Way, plaguing their Enemies, and dividing the Red-Sea before them; and yet they soon forgot his mighty Works, and turned aside from the right Way; and, alas, May not this aggravate the Defections, whereof we, in
this

this Land, are guilty, that we have turned aside from God, after many surprising, and almost miraculous Deliverances that he has wrought for us? (2.) Defections frequently happen in the midst of the clearest Revelation of the Gospel, and when the Light of the Gospel is shining with the greatest Brightness among a People. This People here they had heard Christ himself preach, who spake as never Man spake; and yet, immediately upon the Back of hearing him, they turned their Back upon him. This also aggravates our Defections, and abounding Sins, that they are under the clearest Sun-shine of Gospel-Revelation; *If I had not come and spoken unto them, they had not had Sin; but now they have no Cloke for their Sin.* (3.) After very solemn Professions of Love and Friendship unto Christ. This People here, they professed such a Kindness unto Christ, that they would needs make him a King; and they are so taken with him, that they follow him to the other Side of the Sea; and yet alas they went back, and walked no more with him. Thus *Israel* also, they seemingly professed, That whatever the Lord their God should command them, that they would observe and do; but they *quickly turned aside, like a deceitful Bow.* My Friends, Ye have been professing Friendship to Christ, before Men and Angels, by partaking of the Symbols of his Body and Blood. O! Take Care that ye be not found practically renouncing your Sacramental Engagements, by entering upon a Course of Defection; Alas, may not the Defections of many Professors be dated from a Communion-Table? They come away, after they have got the Sop, with more of Hell and the Devil in them, than before. (4.) After some remarkable common Illumination, and

and seeming Experiences in Religion, *Heb. vi. &c.* It was an high Aggravation of *Solomon's Sin*, that he went astray, after the Lord had several Times appeared to him. (5.) The Time of worldly Prosperity, *Deut. xxxiii. 15.* *Jesurun* waxed fat, and kicked: And *Hos. xiii. 6.* According to their Pasture, so were they filled; they were filled, and their Heart was exalted, therefore have they forgotten me. (6.) A Time of Trial, and Persecution for Righteousness-Sake, when Enemies are invading the Rights and Privileges of the Church of Christ, casting Fire into his Sanctuary, and polluting the Dwelling-place of his Name. This is a Season, wherein the Lord calls for a special Testimony for him at the Hand of Professors; and yet even then, many do fall off, and sail with the Stream. The Stony-ground-Hearers, when Affliction or Persecution arises because of the Word, immediately they are offended: Rotten Fruit usually drops off in a Storm, and the Wind commonly drives away the Chaff. (7.) Defection may happen among a People, even when there is a Remnant keeping their Ground, and maintaining their Integrity; as ye see here, when the Multitude are turning their Back on Christ, he says to his Disciples, *Will ye also go away?* Unto which they answered, *Lord, Whither shall we go, but unto thee, for thou hast the Words of eternal Life?* *Rev. iii. 4.* *Thou hast a few Names in Sardis, &c.*

The Fourth Thing is, To enquire who they are that make this Defection from Christ; we are told here, That they were Disciples, that is, they were so professedly: They pretended to be Disciples, and had gone considerable Lengths with Christ, which had procured this Character unto them; for,

1st, They had entred into Christ's School, and got many a sweet Lesson; but *bearing many Things, they did not observe them.* 2^{dly}, They were Disciples, for they owned him as their Master and Lord, *v. 25.* When they found him on the other Side of the Sea, they say unto him? *Rabbi, when camest thou hither;* and, *v. 34.* *Lord, evermore give us of that Bread.* Of the same Kind are these, *Matth. vii 22.* who cried, *Lord, Lord, have we not prophesied in thy Name, &c.* 3^{dly}, They were a Sett of Men, that had a very fiery Edge upon them for a While; for they not only followed Christ through the Sea, but they have seemingly very strong Desires after Christ, and the Bread of Life; *Lord,* say they, *evermore give us this Bread;* but, though with their Mouth they pretended much Love, yet their Heart went after their Covetousness. 4^{thly}, They are called Disciples, for they joined themselves unto the Society of the true and real Disciples of Christ, and go along with them, in following Christ for a considerable Time, but yet turn their Backs on them at length. 5^{thly}, They had been Eye and Ear-witnesses of the Doctrine and Miracles of Christ; and yet, for all this, they went back, and walked no more with him. Thus ye see upon what Account they might be called Disciples. And now, seeing in the Text, we are told that they were many; hence therefore ye may take the following Observations or Remarks. (1.) That, among the Multitude of Professors, Christ has commonly but a thin Backing, in a winnowing and sifting Time; there was but a handful that stayed with Christ: The greatest Multitude dropt off, the Heap of Corn is but small, when the Straw and Chaff are separate from it: Christ's Flock is but a little Flock; *Many*

are called, but few are chosen. *Strait is the Gate, and narrow is the Way, that leadeth unto Life, and few there be that find it.* (2.) As Christ has but a thin Backing; so the greatest Number of Professors usually dance to the Devil's Pipe, and comply with the Side of the Times: Many of them went back, only the Twelve stayed behind; *Broad is the Way that leadeth unto Destruction, and many there be that go in thereat.* (3.) Defection from Christ, is of a very spreading and contagious Nature; a little of this Leaven, is fair to leaven the whole Lump; like a Pestilential Air, it flies over a whole Country or Kingdom in a very little Time. Among the many Thousands in *Israel*, only seven Thousand had not bowed unto *Baal*; there were but a few Names in *Sardis*, which had not defiled their Garments. Hence it follows, (4.) That the Way of the Multitude is always to be suspected; and People are near to think themselves safe enough, because they have many Neighbours; for we are not to follow a Multitude to do Evil, in regard the Way of the Multitude, is a Way commonly loathed of God. (5.) The Followers of Christ need not be discouraged, because of the Paucity of their Number; for it has been so in all Ages: It was so at first, and will be so to the End of the World; When the Son of Man cometh, shall he find Faith in the Earth? And therefore I say, though ye should sit like a Pelican in the Wilderness, and Owl in the Desert, though ye should become the Song of the Drunkard, and be held for Signs and Wonders in *Israel*, because of the Singularity of your Way; yet be not discouraged at this; for it is far better to go to Heaven alone, than to Hell in Company.

Now if it be asked, Why the Lord suffereth Defections

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fections among his professed Disciples? I answer briefly, 1st. Because God will have a Difference put between the Precious and the Vile. 1 Cor. xi. 19. *There must needs be Heresies among you, that these which are approved may be made manifest*: God will have the Chaff distinguished from the Wheat, the Dross from the true Gold: He will have his Israel proved and tried, that they may be distinguished from others. 2^{dly}. That real Disciples may be excited to cleave to the Lord with the more Firmness and Resolution: Lord, *Whither shall we go, but unto thee?* said the Twelve, when they saw the Multitude running away: We have a Word to this Purpose, Job xvii. 8, 9. *The Innocent shall stir up himself against the Hypocrites; and then it immediately follows, The Righteous shall hold on his Way, and he that hath clean Hands shall add Strength, as in the Hebrew, or be stronger and stronger; intimating thus much, that the Defections of Hypocrites from the Way of the Lord, sharpens the Resolution of the truly Godly in cleaving thereunto; for, at such a Time, God, as it were, is issuing his Proclamation in the Camp of Israel, Who is on the Lord's Side? Unto which we may add, that these Defections of pretended Disciples, do in a Way of righteous Judgment prove Stumbling-Blocks to others, whereby they are hardened in a Way of Sin; and thus a Wo falls both upon the Offender, and the Offended; according to that of Christ's Wo to the World because of Offences: Offences must needs come, but Wo to that Man by whom the Offence cometh.*

The Fifth Thing, is to give a few Characters of those who fall off finally, and walk no more with Christ; only before I go on, I would premit, that I don't here offer to give positive Marks of an irre-

coverable Condition; for who can set Bounds to the infinite Grace and Mercy of Him, to whom no Case is desperate, and who is able to save, to the uttermost of Sin, and to the uttermost of Misery? But all I do is, to offer some melancholy Symptoms or Presumptions of an irrecoverable Defection. (1.) Its a shrewd Evidence of a final Defection, when People fall off from the Profession and Practice of Religion, after some signal, tho' common Illuminations and Irradiations of the Spirit; for which ye may read, *Heb. vi. 4, 5, 6.* (2.) When People, through the Influence of these common Illuminations in the Knowledge of Christ, have been led to make considerable Advances in the Way of Religion, and yet afterward apostatize and fall hack into that same Puddle of Wickedness, which they seemed to have escaped; a pregnant Scripture, for this, ye have, *2 Pet. ii. 20, 21.* (3.) When People knowingly and wilfully venture upon a Way of Sin, after they have received the Knowledge of the Truth; for which see *Heb. x. 26, 27.* When Folk come that Length, especially after a Profession of Religion, as to become Mockers of true Piety, attempting to ridicule Things sacred, and to banter these out of their Religion, whom they think to be aiming Heavenward; this is a black Mark of One that is intirely given up of God, this being an open Proclamation of War against Heaven. *Be not Mockers, lest your Bands be made strong.* (5.) Those, whose Hearts are filled with Malice against the Image of God in his People, who nauseate and detest the very Picture of Holiness in his People, and become open Persecuters of Christ in his Members, and take all Methods imaginable to extirpate the Name of Christ and Christianity out of the World,

as did the cursed Apostate *Julian*. (6.) When People get Success and Prosperity in a Way of Sin; they thirst after Sin, and God grants them the Desire of their Hearts, this is a Sign of total and final Defection; for says the Lord, *Backsliders in Heart shall be filled with their own Ways*. Perhaps, Sirs, You think all is right, because God in his Providence does not check you in your sinful Ways: But assure your selves, there cannot be a sadder Mark of his Wrath and Vengeance; for then he seems to be saying, *They are joined to their Idols, let them alone; let him that is filthy, be filthy still*.

(7.) When, after Challenges of Consequence, Rebukes from the Word and Spirit upon the account of Sin, all comes to be hush'd up in a profound Silence, and the Senes of the Soul are lock'd up in a deep Slumber; then it would appear, that God is saying, as he said to the old World, *My Spirit shall no more strive with them: They would not hearken unto my Voice, Israel would have none of me; wherefore I gave them up to their Hearts Lusts, and they walked after their own Counsels. I would have purged them, and they were not purged; therefore they shall not be purged from their Filthiness any more, until I have caused my Fury to rest on them*. We have a sad Instance of this Nature, *Isa. vi. 3*. There is a People, on whom God had taken a great deal of Pains, as we read *Chap. v*. he had chosen them as his Vineyard, planted them in a fruitful Soil; but all his Labour was lost, they still went on in a Course of Defection and Apostacy; instead of Grapes, they brought forth wild Grapes. Well, at length God seals them up under a Stroke of judicial Blindness and Hardness, so that no Reproof from Word, Providence or Conscience should ever

ever dare upon them. Go, says the Lord, and make the Heart of this People fat, shut their Eyes, stop their Ears, lest they should see with their Eyes, hear with their Ears, understand with their Heart, and convert and be healed.

Before I proceed to the Application, I shall obviate a Question, which some serious Soul may be ready to move, upon what has been said in the former Head, viz. Wherein lies the Difference between the partial and temporary Defections of the Godly; and these total, final, and irrecoverable Apostacies of Hypocrites, and temporary Believers? Unto which I answer, 1st, The Believer, when he is left to backslide, or to fall into any Sin, he howls and groans under it; it lies heavy on him, like a Burden too heavy for him to bear; mine Iniquities have taken Hold on me, that I am not able to look up; they are more than the Hairs of my Head, therefore my Heart faileth me. They can never enjoy themselves with Satisfaction, till they be recovered again; an Instance of this we have in the Apostle Peter, after he had been left to make that foul Step of Defection, in denying Christ, with Curses and Imprecations; after Christ gave him but a Look, he went out, and wept bitterly: The same we see in David, Psal. li. after he had been guilty of Murder and Adultery, in the Matter of Uriah and Bathsheba; How doth he lament and bewail his Folly? And that, which principally touches them, is not so much the penal, as the moral Evil of their Defection; they are not so much grieved, that they themselves suffer, as that God is dishonoured, and Religion wounded by their Means; as we see in David, v. 3. Against thee, thee only, have I sinned, and in thy Sight is this Evil. 2^{dly}, They are never at Rest or Ease, till

till they have the Gilt and Filth of their Sin expiate and washed away, by the Blood and Spirit of the Lord Jesus ; and all the World will not quiet their Consciences, till this be obtained. O, says David, after he had made this foul Step, *Wash me thoroughly from mine Iniquities, and cleanse me from my Sins ;* and again, *v. 7. Purge me with Hyssop, and I shall be clean, wash me, and I shall be whiter than the Snow ?* Whereas the Hypocrite, when he falls, he satisfies the Clamours of his Conscience, either by extenuating his Sin, or by multiplying his Duties ; Will the Lord be pleased with Thousands of Rams, or Ten thousand Rivers of Oil ? but he never runs to Christ, to have his Conscience sprinkled from dead Words. 3dly, The Believer, after he has fallen, he doth not satisfy himself with a turning from Sin unto God, but he must have some reviving Intimations of God's Favour, and reconciled Countenance ; as David, *v. 8. Make me to hear Joy and Gladness, that the Bones which thou hast broken may rejoice.* Though all the World should fawn upon him, yet it will not please him, unless he get a Smile from God himself. 4thly, The Believer, when he falls, his Fall leads him to bewail the Corruption and Depravation of his Nature ; he traces the Streams to the Fountain, and sits down there, and weeps over it, as the Cause of all his Defections and Backslidings from God, as David did, *v. 5. Behold, I was shapen in Iniquity, and in Sin did my Mother conceive me ;* and looks up to God for a Cast of renewing Grace, *v. 10. Create in me a clean Heart, and renew a right Spirit within me ;* whereas Hypocrites, they bewail the Loss of their Reputation, more than they do their Sin, or the Depravation of their Nature. 5thly, When Believers fall, they
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come under fresh Engagements, through Grace, to walk more closely with God than ever they have done before, and endeavour to be more serviceable to him in their Generation than ever; as *David*, *v. 13. Restore to me the Joy of thy Salvation, then will I teach Transgressors thy Ways, and Sinners shall be converted unto thee.* 6thly, As burnt Bairns dread the Fire, they are afraid of falling into the same Sins again; and, for this End, indent with God, not in their own, but only in his Strength, to keep them; as *David*, *Uphold me with thy free Spirit*; and again elsewhere, *Hold up my Goings in thy Paths, that my Footsteps may not slide*; and, *Psal. cxix. 5. O that my Ways were directed to keep thy Statutes!* Now, from these Marks of the partial Falls of the Godly, ye may easily gather the Difference between them, and the damnable Apostacy and total Defection of Hypocrites and Reprobates.

And, now I go on to the Application of this Doctrine; and all the Use I make of it, shall be in a Word of Exhortation; Is it so, that many of Christ's pretended Disciples do, some Time or other, fall totally and finally away from him? Then let me exhort and perswade all hearing me; but especially you, who have been lifting up your Hands to him at a Communion-table, and professing to be his Disciples, by laying your Hands on a slain Redeemer, To endeavour Firmness and Stability, in cleaving to Christ and his Way: O, let it not be said of you, as it is said of thir Disciples here, *From that Time they went back, and walked no more with him.*

To enforce this Exhortation, consider, *First*, The Evil of Apostacy, either in Part, or in Whole. *1st*, It is a Provocation of the highest Nature; and
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there are especially two Evils in it, which cannot but awaken divine Resentment, viz. Treachery and Ingratitude ; (1.) There is Treachery in it ; What Husband would take it well, if his Wife should abandon him, and follow after other Lovers ? My Friends, you have been taking God for your Husband, in a solemn Manner, before Angels and Men ; and, Will it not be Treachery in the highest Degree, to go and prostitute your Souls unto Sin, his greatest Enemy ? Will not this cast a Calumny and Reproach upon God, as if others were better than he ? This will make him say, *What Iniquity have your Fathers found in me. &c. O ? my People, what have I done unto thee ? wherein have I wearied thee ?* (2.) There is Ingratitude in it also ; It was a very cutting Word that Christ had to his Disciples, in the Verse following our Text, *Will ye also leave me ?* The same is he saying to every one of you, *Will ye also go away ?* After such Proofs of my Kindness, after such repeated Vows and Obligations. From all which it is evident, that Apostacy is a Provocation of the highest Nature. 2dly, Your Backsliding will give a deep Wound to Religion, and bring up a Reproach upon the good Ways of God : You have been owning him as your Lord and Master, and declaring before the World, That you think his Service the best Service, his Wages the best Wages ; that one Day in his Courts is better than a Thousand. Now, if after all you backslide, will not the World conclude, That you have not found that in his Service, which you expected, and thus others will be scarred from the good Ways of the Lord. (3.) You will grieve the Hearts of the Godly, whose Hearts God would not grieve ; and it is a dangerous Thing to offend one of his little

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Ones ; *It were better for you, that a Millstone were hanged about your Neck, and you cast into the Midst of the Sea, than that you should offend one of these little Ones.* (4.) If ye shall apostatise in whole, and slide back with a perpetual Backsliding, it will be a Prelude of your eternal Banishment and Separation from the Presence of God : God's Soul takes no Pleasure in Backsliding, and therefore they can never have Access into his gracious Presence, consequently shall be punished with everlasting Destruction. (5.) If ye be Believers, and apostatise in Part, ye shall put a Whip in God's Hand to chastise you ; if ye shall, after this, turn careless in your Walk, more remiss in Duty, less frequent, less fervent, less lively than before, ye may assure yourselves, that ye shall not go unpunished ; *You only have I known, of all the Families of the Earth ; therefore I will punish you, for all your Iniquities. If his Children forsake my Laws, and keep not my Commandments, then will I visit their Transgression with the Rod, and their Iniquity with Stripes.*

Consider, Secondly, Some great Advantages of Stability in cleaving to Christ, and standing firm to his Cause and Interest ; 1st, It will furnish you much inward Peace and Tranquillity of Mind, *Great Peace have all they that love the Law.* God tells Israel, That if they had cleaved unto him, and his Way, *their Peace should have been as a River, and their Righteousness as the Waves of the Sea.* 2^{dly}, It will glorify God, and reflect a Lustre upon Religion, make the World conclude ye serve a good Master ; hence is that of Christ, *Let your Light so shine before Men, that they may see your good Works, and glorify your Father which is in Heaven.* 3^{dly}, As Backsliding strikes a Damp upon the Spirit, at
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the Approaches of Death, so Stability of Heart, in the Lord's Way, affords Courage and Confidence through Christ, upon the Approach of that grim Messenger of the Lord of Hosts; hence is that of Paul, *I have fought the good Fight, I have finished my Course, I have kept the Faith; Henceforth there is laid up for me a Crown of Righteousness, &c.* 4thly, The Reward of Grace is insured in Christ to the stedfast Soul, 1 Cor. xv. Last, *Be ye stedfast and immovable, always abounding in the Work of the Lord, and your Labour shall not be in vain in the Lord: Remember that your Title to the Reward comes in, by Virtue of your Union with Christ; and, O how glorious is that Reward the stedfast Soul is entituled to through him? It has a Kingdom secured to it; Ye are they which have continued with me in my Temptations, and I appoint unto you a Kingdom, a Throne. Rev. iii. Last. To him that overcometh will I grant to sit with me upon my Throne; a Crown is secured, a Crown of Life, be then faithful unto Death, and I will give you a Crown of Life, a Crown of Glory; when the chief Shepherd shall appear, ye shall receive a Crown of Glory, which fadeth not away; a Crown of Righteousness, which is laid up for all that keep the Faith, and love his Appearing; a Crown of Joy, yea, a Crown of everlasting Joy, shall be upon their Heads, and Sorrow and Sighing shall fly away,*

I conclude with Two or three Advices, (1.) Take Care that the Foundation be well laid, upon the everlasting Rock Jesus Christ; for this is the Foundation that God hath laid in Zion, and another Foundation can no Man lay; ye must be cemented to this Foundation by the Spirit and Faith, otherwise ye can never stand in a Day of Trial, for your Root being Rottenness, your Blossom shall go up

as the Dust ; the House built upon the Sand fell when the Floods came, and the Winds blew and beat upon it, but the House founded upon THIS ROCK shall stand out against the utmost Efforts of the Gates of Hell. (2.) Maintain an everlasting Jealousy over your own Hearts, for he that trusteth his own Heart is a Fool, considering that it is deceitful above all Things, and desperately wicked ; particularly take Heed, of the Workings and Sproutings of the bitter Root of Unbelief, which causes to depart from the living God, *Heb. iii. 12.* (5.) Keep your Eyes upon the Promises of persevering Grace, particularly that, *Jer. xxxii. 40.* *I will make an everlasting Covenant with them, that I will never turn away from them to do them Good, but I will put my Fear in their Hearts, that they shall not depart from me ;* If you plead and improve this Promise by Faith, it is impossible ye can draw back, for it is impossible for God to lie : God, he stands on both Sides of the Covenant, to fulfill both his and our Part of the same ; and therefore plead, That he may fulfill his in you, that he would keep you, by his Power, through Faith unto Salvation. (6.) Keep a steady Eye on Christ, the blessed Mediator of the Covenant ; Eye him as the Store-house and Fountain of all your Supplies of Grace and Strength, for it is out of his Fulness that we receive, and Grace for Grace. Eye him as your Captain, to fight all your Battles against Sin and Satan, for he has spoiled Principalities and Powers ; and if ever we overcome, it must be in the Blood and Strength of the Lamb. Eye him as your Guide, to lead you through all the dark and difficult Steps of your Pilgrimage, for He leads the Blind in a Way that they have not known. Eye him as your Father, en-

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deavour to Imitate him in all his imitable Perfections: run your Christian Race, looking unto Jesus Remember how steady and firm he was in carrying on the great Work of Redemption; he set his Face like a Flint against all the Storms and Obstacles that lay in his Way, he did not Faint, nor was he discouraged, but travelled on in the Greatest of his Strength, enduring the Cross, and despising the Shame, for he said no the Cross, it is finish'd: So study ye, after his Example, to run your Christian Race, your Course of Obedience, and press on against all Temptations and Difficulties, till ye have finished your Course with Joy, and arrive at the Mark and Prize of the high Calling of God in Christ. (7.) Be awar of the first Beginnings of Defection and Backsliding, for one Trip makes Way for another. Defections, they are like the Rolling of a Stone upon the Brow of an high Mountain; if once it begin to Roll, it is fair never to rest, till it be at the Bottom: Ye have been upon the Mount of God, Sirs, and if ye begin once to roll down the Hill of your high Professions and Resolutions, it is an Hundred to One, if ye do not land in the Depths of Apostacy, and at last, in the Depths of Hell. (8.) Study to be well skilled in unmasking the Myltery of Iniquity, and in detecting the Wiles and Stratagems of the Tempter, and to provide your selves with suitable Antedotes against every Attrack of the Enemy; for Instance, if he tell thee Sin is pleasant, ask him if the Gripings of the Worm of Conscience be pleasant too; and if one Day in God's House be not better, then a Thousaud in the Tents of Sin? If he tell thee, that no Body sees, ask him if he can shut the Eye of an omniscient God, whose Eyes are as a
Flame.

Flame of Fire, and who setteth our most secret Sins in the Light of his Countenance? If he tell thee it is but a little one, ask him if there be a little God? or if his Displeasure be a little Thing. If he tell thee, that Sin is profitable, ask him, What is a Man profited, if he shall gain the whole World, and and lose his own Soul. By Considerations of this Nature, the Mind comes to be fortified against the Attacks and Onsets of that grand Enemy of Salvation, and prove a notable Balast, to keep the Soul firm and steddy against the most violent Storms and Tempests that may blow either from Earth or Hell.

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